

The Black Thing in the Cellar

This ghost tale from New Jersey may illustrate the moral that if you happen to have a ghost in your house, the most practical curse of action is to be hospitable. It might even pay off in hard cash...

It seems that a house in Trenton had been known to be haunted for many years, and nobody would rent it, in spite of its being an attractive little cottage in a nice neighborhood. Finally a local man with a rather bad reputation appeared and offered to take it over. The owner informed him of the house's reputation and detailed its history. The man was not at all fazed. He laughed and signed the lease, saying he wasn't afraid of man, monster, or ghost.

One night, after living in the house about a week, the tenant had to go into the cellar. He took a candle and headed down. He was two steps above its stone floor when a huge black "thing" rose up at the bottom of the stairs. It had two glowing yellow-white eyes that seemed to stare clear through him. The man was startled but instead of fleeing he swore at the phantom and hurled his candlestick at it.

The neighbors found him a day or so later. He was alive, but all his hair was burned off, and he was a mass of bruises from head to toe. He moved out as soon as he was able to.

The next tenant was a gentle elderly lady who did a great deal of work for the local church. She had heard about the phantom, but the little house was inexpensive and it suited her and she decided to move in, ghost or no ghost. She would take her chances, she said. It was lucky for her that she did.

After several days in the house, with no disturbance, she too had to go to the cellar after dark. As the gleams of the candle lighted up the stone cellar, the black thing rose up before her. She held the candle higher and said very calmly, "My, you startled me, my friend, but what in the name of heaven do you want? Is there anything I can do to help you, as long as we are going to live here

together?"

To her astonishment the black shape motioned for the lady to follow. It slowly drifted back across the stone flagging of the floor to an old wooden chest in the corner. She followed with the candle and obeyed the directions of the "thing" when it motioned for her to move the chest aside. It was empty, and she moved it easily. She found a loose flagstone underneath. The murky figure motioned for her to lift the flagstone, and again she complied.

Underneath it was a lead-lined box full of old gold coins. She stared at them for a moment. Then, half to herself, she said, "Can these be for me?" and turned to look at the phantom. It was gone but a cool breeze touched her on the cheek, in an almost friendly caress.